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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 000459

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS AND IO/PSC (MROZINSKI)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/12/2018

TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: REQUEST TO SRI LANKA TO PROVIDE AVIATION SUPPORT
IN DARFUR

REF: STATE 49277

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (C) Ambassador and ODC Chief Orozco met with Sri Lankan Secretary of Defense Gotabhaya Rajapaksa on May 12 to request that Sri Lanka offer Mi-8 or Mi-24 helicopters to support the UN-AU peacekeeping operation in Darfur. Drawing on the background in para 4 of reftel, Ambassador noted that Sudan is one of the USG's highest foreign policy priorities. While African countries would provide infantry units and other contributions, there remains a critical need for combat-capable attack helicopters and military utility helicopters. The Ambassador also noted the USG's willingness to consider requests for upgrading or sustaining any helicopters the Sri Lankan military might provide.

¶2. (C) Rajapaksa agreed to consider the USG's request. He undertook to consult Air Force Commander Goonetilleke as soon as possible. Rajapaksa said Sri Lanka relies on Mi-17 helicopters for its troop carriers and is looking to purchase more of those. He cautioned, however, that Sri Lanka's lift capabilities are limited. "We can't transport even a battalion," he said. Ambassador said the USG would appreciate knowing what helicopters Sri Lanka could make available. If the model could be of potential use, the USG would likely dispatch an assessment team to view the asset(s). Ambassador again underlined the urgency of the request.

¶3. (C) DCM previewed our request to Rajapaksa in a meeting with Foreign Secretary Palitha Kohona on May 10. Kohona also agreed to take a close look at the request.

¶4. (C) Comment: Sri Lanka is now engaged in intensive military operations against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam on four fronts. Our offer to upgrade or help sustain whatever helicopters Sri Lanka might be willing to provide may nonetheless be of interest to the GSL because U.S. and other restrictions on military exports due to concerns about human rights and child soldiers are beginning to affect the operational readiness of the Sri Lankan military. Ambassador will also contact Tourism Minister Moragoda, who plays an important advisory role on US-Sri Lankan mil-mil relations, to underscore the importance and urgency of this request.

Embassy also recommends that the Department brief Sri Lankan Ambassador Goonetilleke in Washington on Ambassador's approach to Defense Secretary Rajapaksa so Goonetilleke can encourage a favorable response.

BLAKE